

BULLETIN OF THE GREAT NEUVAIN OF NOVEMBER 2019

This year the novena coincides with the Bicentenary of the founding of the Mennaisian Congregations, especially the **Brothers of Christian Instruction**. Now that the Cause is entering a decisive phase, let us double our efforts of prayer and closeness to our Founders, especially Jean-Marie. We all want Father de la Mennais to be recognized as "**a Saint**" by the Church, as "**a model of fidelity to the Church and patron of our Christian schools**" (traditional prayer). At the same time we are called to open a new page, which actualises the time of grace of the foundation. Our Founders responded to the Holy Spirit's call and they accepted to walk like Abraham, not knowing where they were going, guided only by Him.

In them burned the fire of Pentecost. They knew that their work was "**the work of God**", inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the presence of the living Jesus. These were years of enthusiasm for Gabriel and Jean-Marie, full of dreams and dynamism transmitted to young people. Simple young people, normal, but touched by the fire of the Holy Spirit lit by the Founders. The sacrifices and the privations, the discomfort and the poverty, all that was exceeded by the impetus given by the Founders. Their mission was a divine mission: it carried the good news of the Gospel to the little ones and the poor.

The years of the Foundation had pushed two men who had their feet on the ground, to achieve works on the verge of madness. Opened series of schools, with young people without training, with only the Parish Priest as a companion, started a business without sufficient economic resources, established schools that were more and more in remote areas, initiated young people for their entire life in this adventure, all these choices were beyond what was reasonable. The only reason was trust in Providence. The work of the Brothers was a **work of God**, He wanted it and would provide for it! The Founders were going to make it possible.

The Founders were fully aware that this Foundation was **not their work**, but that they themselves were mere workers in the vineyard of the Lord. In fact they did not hesitate to detach themselves from their work, to answer the Lord's call, as Abraham detached himself from his son Isaac. Gabriel went away to renovate and refound other Congregations. Jean-Marie was called to Paris to collaborate in an important work of the Church of France. Of course, their heart remained close to "**their**" **Brothers**, but in practice they were separated from them. They put their trust in God who was **himself responsible for the care and growth of the new Congregation**. It was his work and not theirs. Like a child in the arms of its mother, so they trusted Providence **in everything and for everything**.

The focus of the Founders, Brothers and Sisters of these new Congregations, was turned towards the little ones whom the Lord had entrusted to them. They were the children of the people, the new generations that grew up in human and spiritual ignorance, destined to be influenced by atheistic and secularized ideologies. For them they became their fathers and their elder brothers, the guardian angels of their frailty, the apostles who would distribute the bread of Christian instruction, the sheep of the flock of God who would protect them against false ideologies. They devoted all their time, health and energy to them. These missionary Brothers were so enthusiastic about their work of evangelization through the schools, that were hardly fifteen years after the foundation, they did not hesitate to "throw the nets" (their lives) on the word of Jesus in the distant seas of the Colonies, where they faced the most severe trials until the total gift of their young lives.

Jean-Marie's dream, supported by the "brother" Gabriel, was truly grandiose. To France, which took the lead in the construction of a completely secular society, without God, he wanted to give another direction: to build a society inspired by faith and fully respectful of the real rights of man and citizens. A society where the integral dimension of the sons of God would be respected in each person. Jean-Marie had worked and fought for this ideal of culture inspired by faith, a culture in which instruction and faith are joined at the same time. So "his schools" are made to make known and to love Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

Let us turn then, during these years of grace, to our "holy" Founders, to be able to renew our response to our holy vocation. Let's launch into the deep. Let's throw the nets into the world of today's young and old. **We are the Jean-Marie and Gabriel of today.**